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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Sixty-second session

Summary record of the 54th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 20 September 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Bras Gomes

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Fourth periodic report of the Republic of Korea (E/C.12/KOR/4; E/C.12/KOR/Q/4 and Add.1)

At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Republic of Korea took places at the Committee table.

1. **Mr. Chang** In-Jong (Republic of Korea) said that the new Administration that had taken office in May 2017 gave human rights high priority. His Government had made efforts to carry out the recommendations made by the Committee following its review in 2009, including granting the National Human Rights Commission of Korea greater independence, protecting non-regular workers, ensuring that the minimum wage was enforced and increasing the number of labour inspectors.

2. The third National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights currently being prepared took into account the changes brought about in Korean society by low fertility and population ageing and emphasized the right to health and a safe, clean environment and the protection of the most vulnerable segments of the population. The Government was also seeking ways to encourage businesses to engage in human rights-friendly activities.

3. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea Act, as amended in February 2016, stipulated qualification criteria for commissioners and ensured that persons from different social sectors were part of the nomination and selection process. While the Commission had been downsized in 2009, the staff was currently being restored to the previous level with a view to ensuring that it could carry out its functions effectively.

4. Turning to the issue of corruption, he pointed out that, under the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act of 2016, improper solicitations to public officials were subject to punishment, and public officials were prohibited from receiving money and goods from others. His Government expected that the Act would significantly reduce corruption among public officials.

5. Pursuant to the Framework Act on the Treatment of Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea, the Government drafted a plan on immigration policies every five years, in response to the growing number of foreigners residing in the country, which sought to ensure that foreign nationals were afforded full protection of human rights. Furthermore, the grounds on which foreign workers were entitled to change employers had been expanded, and provision had been made for exceptions to the limit on the number of changes in employment that were allowed. In 2015, the Government had recognized a migrant workers trade union. The Republic of Korea had enacted a refugee law in 2013, the first Asian country to do so, with a view to ensuring that refugee status determination procedures were fair and effective and the rights of refugees were protected, in accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

6. Despite difficult economic conditions, the Republic of Korea had joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee in 2009 and had been fulfilling its official development assistance commitments. Such assistance had steadily increased, from $810 million in 2009 to $1.96 billion, or 0.14 per cent of gross national income, in 2016.

7. Regarding gender equality, the Government had enacted the Gender Impact Analysis and Assessment Act in 2011, which had helped in developing and implementing policies from a gender perspective and drawing up gender-sensitive budgets. Given that the gender wage gap largely stemmed from interruptions in women's careers, because they shouldered most childbearing and child-rearing duties, the Government had reinforced policies to foster a work-family balance, had steadily increased the number of women's employment centres and had expanded advanced professional training programmes nationwide. In

September 2017, the new Administration had increased the amount of monthly benefits for the first three months of parental leave, and the fathers' childcare leave bonus scheme would be strengthened starting in 2018.

8. In January 2017, only 2 of the 22 Cabinet members had been women, accounting for a meagre 9.1 per cent of the Cabinet. However, under the new Administration, the number of female members of the Cabinet had increased as of September 2017 to 6 out of 19, or 31.6 per cent. The Government would make continuous efforts to increase women's representation in high-level public positions.

9. The Government had amended legislation on fixed-term, part-time and temporary workers in 2013 to redress undue discriminatory practices against non-regular workers. The amendment clarified prohibited areas of discrimination and ensured that punitive damages could be imposed for flagrant or repeated discrimination. The Government had also recruited 45 new labour inspectors in 2016 and 204 in 2017, and their number was expected to continue to increase.

10. In 2017, the Government had issued guidelines on according regular employment status to non-regular workers in the public sector, in an effort to prevent the excessive use of irregular employment for cost-cutting purposes. Moreover, plans to prevent fatal industrial accidents had been announced in August 2017, with a key focus on preventing the so-called outsourcing of risks and on increasing contractors' responsibility for maintaining a safe working environment. In August 2017, the Government had also set a new minimum wage for 2018, which would be increased by 16.4 per cent, compared with an average annual increase of 7 to 8 per cent for the previous four years.

11. The Government had been working to strengthen the social security system by providing stable incomes for vulnerable groups. Under the new pension scheme that had been introduced following enactment of the Basic Pension Act in May 2014, persons aged 65 years or older with incomes in the bottom 70 per cent were entitled to basic pension benefits. The monthly pension would rise, to 250,000 won (₩) in 2018 and ₩300,000 by 2021. The first comprehensive plan for basic livelihood security had been developed in August 2017.

12. The new Administration was making efforts to ensure the steady supply of public rental housing and aimed to increase the stock of long-term public rental housing from 6.3 per cent in 2016 to above the OECD average of 9 per cent by 2022. It also planned to expand housing assistance to young people.

13. Regarding the right to health, the Government was pursuing policies to reduce co-payments for certain medical services and to place a cap on such costs based on the recipient's income level. It was also taking steps to expand the coverage of the national health insurance scheme and reduce the burden of medical expenditures.

14. Turning to the right to education, he said that compulsory free education was provided at the primary and middle school level. The Government was promoting institutional reform that would gradually expand free education to the high school level. In 2011, the Government had amended the Higher Education Act, which had placed a ceiling on tuition fee increases.

15. Since 2012, the Government had been implementing the Rainbow Bridge Project to provide cultural minority groups such as immigrants with an opportunity to express their cultural identity. Under the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Act, adopted in 2014, the Government provided assistance for artistic activities and created opportunities for minority groups to express their cultural identity while encouraging social integration.

16. **Mr. Kedzia** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to congratulate the State party on its systematic approach to the protection of human rights based on periodic national human rights action plans. In that connection, he asked whether a comprehensive assessment of the second National Action Plan had been completed; if so, the Committee would be grateful to learn about its main findings. It would be useful to know whether civil society had been involved in the assessment and the extent to which it had participated in developing the third Plan. Further details of the strategies that had been devised and

resources allocated for the implementation of the Plan, and of the interaction between the National Human Rights Policy Council and civil society, would also be appreciated.

17. According to an OECD report on the ratio of social welfare spending to gross domestic product (GDP), the Republic of Korea ranked thirty-fourth out of 35 member countries, spending 10.4 per cent of its GDP on social welfare compared to the OECD average of 21 per cent. He therefore wished to know whether the State party was planning any measures that would significantly accelerate the growth of social spending. The following factors should be mentioned in that context: first, the tax burden in the country was relatively low; and secondly, responsibility for the care of family members, including children, older persons and persons with disabilities, traditionally fell to female members of families. Moreover, the Government seemed to be shifting responsibility for providing public services to the private sector. Further information on plans to reform the tax system, the instruments in place to control the delivery of public services and the role of public institutions in the delivery of such services would thus be welcome.

18. He asked whether the Government envisaged specific steps to address the high levels of poverty among older persons and the very low birth rate in the Republic of Korea, and what accounted for the persistent high rate of suicide since 2003, especially in rural areas.

19. Turning to the impact of the Covenant on the national legal framework, he asked what measures the State party was taking to raise awareness about the Covenant rights among judges, lawyers and law enforcement officials.

20. Commending the strong commitment by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea to the protection of human rights, he found it regrettable, however, that the Commission's mandate to consider complaints extended only to articles 10 to 22 of the Constitution, which covered civil and political rights. Was the State party considering any amendments of the relevant legislation with a view to empowering the Commission to provide for the full protection of economic, social and cultural rights?

21. He would be grateful if the delegation could inform the Committee whether any legislative or other measures had been taken to prevent and mitigate the adverse effects of business activities on human rights, both at home and abroad. It would be interesting to know whether the State party envisaged adopting a national plan of action on business and human rights. If so, it would be helpful to hear about its main features. He also asked whether any human rights impact assessments of business projects had been carried out, and what institutional solutions were in place to monitor compliance with the principle of human rights due diligence by business. It was unclear what steps had been taken to ensure that victims of economic, social and cultural rights violations by domestic businesses or overseas businesses under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Korea had access to remedies. Further information on the corporate responsibility of chaebols (large family-owned business conglomerates) and their impact on human rights would be useful.

22. It would be interesting to learn more about the continued social controversies over prohibited grounds of discrimination that were referred to in paragraph 14 of the periodic report. Aside from the issue of sexual orientation, referred to in paragraph 18 of the replies to the list of issues, did those controversies entail grounds such as nationality or ethnic origin? He would be grateful if the delegation could comment on the prospects for adopting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. He asked what were the main findings of the assessments carried out under the gender impact analysis and assessment system, and what corrective measures had been taken to follow up on such assessments.

23. Lastly, he wished to know whether the State party had any plans to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, as it had done for four instruments involving communications procedures and two inquiry procedures. Ratification of the Optional Protocol would help the State party to carry out the provisions of the Covenant in practice.

24. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, asked what obstacles the Government had encountered in its efforts to reduce youth unemployment; whether the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work Family Balance Assistance Act was applicable to small and medium-sized enterprises; what the overall impact of that Act had been; and

whether it prohibited discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

25. Noting that the number of persons in precarious employment had risen and that many employers, particularly chaebols, avoided their obligations through the use of triangular or indirect employment schemes, she enquired whether the Government planned to review the Labour Standard Act and the Trade Union and Labour Relations Adjustment Act, in order to clarify the rights and obligations of workers and employers.

26. In the light of reports that it was difficult for workers to obtain redress following an unfair dismissal and for trade unions to engage in effective social dialogue, she asked how many complaints of unfair dismissal had been submitted to the labour authorities, how those complaints had been handled and what provision was made for social dialogue.

27. Noting that the statistics provided by the State party on the number of workers earning less than the minimum wage were far lower than those provided by other sources, and that the minimum wage for 2018 was lower than the actual cost of living as calculated by the Minimum Wage Council in 2016, she asked whether the delegation could explain those disparities. There was a need to establish a strong collective bargaining system, in order to tackle the growing wage inequalities between and within enterprises, and to remedy the poor working conditions and exploitation faced by foreign migrant workers, especially on fishing vessels.

28. Lastly, she invited the delegation to comment on a number of worrying trends in the social security sector, including the decrease in the social security budget and the drop in the number of persons covered by the non-contributory system.

29. **Mr. Sadi** asked what the main obstacles were to the State party's fulfilment of its obligations under the Covenant and whether its ability to meet those obligations was affected by tensions with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. He enquired whether the State party prioritized some human rights over others, and whether it planned to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

30. Lastly, emphasizing that the national human rights institution should be fully independent, he asked whether the rights enshrined in the Covenant were protected and promoted by that institution on an equal basis with other human rights.

31. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that the delegation should comment on reports that freedom of association was severely restricted and that labour rights were not sufficiently protected. Noting that the Government had expressed willingness to ratify some of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including those on freedom of association and forced labour, he asked whether any action had been taken in that regard.

32. Lastly, he enquired whether the social security legislation adopted in August 2017 had helped to reduce the number of people without access to the National Basic Livelihood Security System, and whether the Basic Pension Scheme had improved the situation of older persons.

33. **Mr. De Schutter**, drawing attention to paragraph 47 (h) of the Committee's general comment No. 23 (2016) on the right to just and favourable conditions of work, asked whether the Government planned to amend the Labour Standards Act or take other measures to ensure that agricultural workers were protected on an equal basis with other workers.

34. He enquired whether the State party had considered ensuring that corporations operating abroad complied with human rights standards by attaching certain conditions to the investments made by the Korean National Pension Fund or to the loans provided by the Export-Import Bank of Korea.

35. Lastly, he invited the delegation to confirm whether certain social security rights were granted exclusively to married couples and could not be exercised by same-sex couples, since same-sex marriage was not provided for by law.

66. **Mr. Iguiniz**, noting that persons wishing to assert their economic, social and cultural rights before an ordinary court faced very high litigation costs, asked what measures were being taken to increase access to justice for the protection of those rights.

67. Pointing out that some pieces of legislation, such as the Military Criminal Act, contained provisions that discriminated against LGBTI persons, he enquired whether the Government planned to repeal those provisions and to adopt a comprehensive law for the protection of LGBTI persons.

68. **The Chair**, noting that the State party had the largest gender pay gap of all member countries of OECD, asked what steps were being taken to reduce that gap and to promote the principle of equal pay for equal work.

69. **Mr. Kedzia** asked how the Government viewed the role of the National Contact Point for the implementation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and what steps would be taken to increase the transparency of its operations and facilitate access to it. He enquired whether the small number of prosecutions relating to corruption reflected a low level of corruption in the State party or shortcomings in the anti-corruption system.

The meeting was suspended at 4.10 p.m. and resumed at 4.30 p.m.

70. **Mr. Chang** Ho-Jong (Republic of Korea), recalling the information provided in paragraphs 1 and 2 of his country's replies to the list of issues, said that the third National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights would cover corporate responsibilities in the field of human rights and would take into account the views of civil society and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework.

71. **Mr. Kim** Taehun (Republic of Korea) said that the people's advisory committee had given positive feedback on a number of measures implemented under the second National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (2012-2016), including the expansion of the National Basic Livelihood Security System. However, there was still progress to be made in many key areas. The Government would decide whether any uncompleted tasks would be carried over to the third National Action Plan.

72. **Ms. Jang** Jaewon (Republic of Korea) said that steps were being taken to increase the social security coverage of vulnerable groups. The number of persons who received basic livelihood benefits was expected to reach more than 2.5 million in the coming five years. Health insurance coverage for four major diseases, including cancer, had been increased, as outlined in paragraph 134 of her country's report.

73. Since 2005, her country had invested ₩120 trillion in measures to raise the fertility rate; the implementation of those measures was overseen by a committee chaired by the President. The Government had adopted a holistic approach in order to address the various root causes of the problem. The third comprehensive plan in that area, which had been adopted in 2016, included the provision of 200,000 houses for newly-weds and support for persons wishing to undergo fertility treatment.

74. The high suicide rate was due to the financial crisis and the breakdown of local communities as a result of industrialization. Since the adoption of legislation on suicide prevention in 2011, the suicide rate had fallen, particularly among older persons. A support system for persons who had attempted suicide had been set up in 2013. Further measures would be taken by the new Administration, which had identified suicide prevention as a national priority.

75. The Government was committed to improving the public pension system. The basic State pension would be increased from its current level of ₩200,000 to ₩250,000 by 2018 and ₩300,000 by 2021. In 2018, a financial review of the National Pension Scheme would be conducted with the aim of improving income replacement rates. In addition, measures would be taken to increase enrolment among specific categories of worker, including temporary workers and the self-employed. Over the following five years, the Government would create an additional *800,000* jobs for older persons with a view to strengthening their participation in public service.

86. **Mr. Kim** Eu-Hyun (Republic of Korea) said that, pursuant to article 6 (1) of the Constitution, international treaties that had been duly concluded and promulgated, such as the Covenant, had the same effect as domestic law, as did generally recognized rules of international law. The provisions of the Covenant were also cited in court judgments.

87. **Ms. Oh** Yoojin (Republic of Korea) said that, in accordance with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea Act, the Commission was responsible for issuing policy recommendations and raising awareness of human rights. The Commission was competent to examine cases of alleged violations of economic, social and cultural rights to the extent that they overlapped with violations of the constitutional rights to pursue happiness and to equality. Further consideration would be given to the possibility of granting the Commission powers to investigate violations of economic, social and cultural rights. The pre-2009 staffing levels of the Commission had been restored, its investigative powers had been strengthened, and it would be transformed further in coming years.

88. **Mr. Kim** Eu-Hyun (Republic of Korea) said that public bodies were evaluated on their compliance with human rights-based management principles. For example, they were evaluated on the extent to which they practised responsible supply chain management and guaranteed the protection of local residents. The Korea International Cooperation Agency would soon adopt a manifesto on human rights-based management principles, and compliance with such principles would be one of the criteria against which project proposals were evaluated. In addition, efforts would be made to encourage compliance with those principles in the implementation of international cooperation projects.

89. **Mr. An** Hunjun (Republic of Korea) said that, owing to various obstacles encountered in the legislative process, it had not been possible to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. Four separate bills had been submitted to the National Assembly, but they had all been defeated. The Government was exploring alternative strategies for the adoption of such a law and was working with civil society organizations to gauge public opinion on the matter. On 12 September 2017, 110 civil society organizations had held a joint press conference to raise awareness of the need for a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, and a campaign to collect signatures in support of such a law had also been launched. The Government would continue to take account of the diverse views of civil society on the matter.

90. The Constitutional Court had repeatedly ruled that the provisions of the Military Criminal Act that prohibited same-sex sexual relations were not unconstitutional. Those provisions were considered necessary in the specific context of the military, but a bill amending the Military Criminal Act with a view to abolishing them was currently pending before the National Assembly. With regard to discrimination against sexual minorities, it should be noted that article 11 of the Constitution and approximately 90 different laws contained provisions on discrimination, and that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was explicitly prohibited in the National Human Rights Commission of Korea Act.

91. **Mr. Kim** Eu-Hyun (Republic of Korea) said that the Constitutional Court had recognized that certain constitutional rights were applicable to both Korean citizens and foreign nationals. However, other rights were applicable only to Korean nationals. The possibility of amending the Constitution to ensure the applicability of basic rights to foreign nationals was under discussion.

92. **Ms. Chang** Mikyung (Republic of Korea) said that the Government conducted assessments of the gender impact of legislative and other initiatives. One of the outcomes of that process had been the harmonization of entitlements to childcare leave.

93. **Ms. Oh** Yoojin (Republic of Korea) said that the Ministry of Justice had conducted a review of its redress procedures and relevant jurisprudence in preparation for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. It had been concluded that the Optional Protocol could not be ratified, as the national legal system was not yet fully in line with its provisions, but the Government would consider the matter further in conjunction with civil society and academia.

54. **Ms. Kim** Ji Eun (Republic of Korea) said that a scheme had recently been introduced to promote the employment of young people by small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, the Government had made it mandatory for public bodies to hire young people and had facilitated their employment overseas. Some 60 university job centres were operational.

55. **Mr. Yoo** Jhong Ho (Republic of Korea) said that an affirmative action policy had been adopted in large corporations and public bodies. It would increase the number of women in employment, and particularly in managerial positions. The names of organizations that failed to comply with the affirmative action policy would be made public. With regard to childcare, the Government had introduced a series of measures that affected the entire workforce, including subsidies for day-care centres and support for flexible working arrangements. In addition, efforts were being made to promote a healthy work-life balance and to encourage men to shoulder some of the burden of childcare responsibilities.

56. **Mr. Yun** Mun Gyu (Republic of Korea) said that, under the Labour Standards Act, workers could file a complaint regarding unfair dismissal with the Labour Relations Commission, which would conduct a review and take corrective measures as appropriate. Workers, employers and public interest commissioners were represented on the Labour Relations Commission.

57. **Ms. Kim** Ji Eun (Republic of Korea) said that job sharing served to reduce long working hours and to increase the number of high-quality jobs. The Labour Standards Act stipulated that the maximum number of working hours per week was 52, and small and medium-sized enterprises would be given support to enable them to overcome any difficulties associated with ensuring respect for that limit.

58. Discrepancies among the various data sets on compliance with the minimum wage were due to differences in methodology. For example, some of the studies had excluded public sector workers, and others had relied on self-reporting. The Minimum Wage Council based its calculations on a range of factors, including productivity rates and consumer price indices. The minimum wage was increasing at a faster rate in the Republic of Korea than in other advanced countries, and the ratio of minimum wages to median earnings, which had nearly doubled over the previous 20 years, was currently higher than in Germany, Japan and the United States of America.

59. **Mr. Yoo** Jhong Ho (Republic of Korea) said that, in principle, a foreign worker who had been hired by a specific employer under the Employment Permit System was required to continue to work for that employer for the duration of his or her stay in the Republic of Korea. However, in certain circumstances, such as the liquidation of the organization in question, a foreign worker could change employer without having to register a new workplace. The Government had issued a standard labour contract for the agricultural and fishing sectors, both of which were exempt from certain provisions of the Labour Standards Act. In recent years, measures had been taken to protect migrants who worked on fishing vessels, and employers could be fined for allowing violations of their rights to occur.

60. **Ms. Oh** Yoojin (Republic of Korea) said that the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families could not currently be ratified, as it conflicted with a number of domestic laws. Nevertheless, several laws that protected the rights of migrant workers were already in force, including the Labour Standards Act, the Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance Act, and the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act. The Government had taken steps to protect migrant workers as a specific vulnerable group.

61. **Mr. Yun** Mun Gyu (Republic of Korea) said that both the Constitution and the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act guaranteed the fundamental labour rights of all workers. Monitoring of unfair labour practices that violated those rights was being strengthened. Striking and engaging in legitimate industrial action were not subject to civil or criminal prosecution. Where industrial action could threaten workers' livelihood, the Government had been working on measures to prohibit the seizure of more than one half of a worker's wages. The criminal courts also applied very strict criteria when determining whether obstruction of business had taken place. The Government sought to promote the understanding that the worker-employer relationship was one of partnership.

62. The Republic of Korea had ratified four of the eight ILO fundamental conventions. Ratification of the remaining four conventions was on the policy agenda of the new Administration. The relevant legal and institutional issues would be reviewed in order to analyse the obstacles to ratification and ensure that domestic law was in line with ILO standards.

63. **Ms. Jang** Jaewon (Republic of Korea) said that the Government had recently amended legislation related to the National Basic Livelihood Security benefit. The criteria for beneficiaries had been differentiated in order to better assist those in need; in addition, the criteria for obligatory support providers were being loosened.

64. **Ms. Liebenberg** (Country Task Force) said that under the current birth registration system only Korean nationals could officially register the birth of their children. The children of asylum seekers and refugees were negatively affected as a result. She wished to know whether the Government had any plans to establish a universal system of birth registration.

65. In 2016, nearly 54,000 cases of domestic violence had been registered for prosecution. She wondered whether there were sufficient shelter facilities for survivors of such violence in the country.

66. Same-sex couples were not legally recognized, which deprived them of the rights afforded to heterosexual couples. She wished to know whether there were any plans to officially recognize same-sex couples.

67. In the light of the sharp increase in child abuse, she would appreciate information on budgetary and other measures contemplated to protect children and prevent child abuse.

68. Although the successful efforts of the State party to reduce absolute poverty were commendable, relative poverty appeared to be on the rise. It would be useful to know what percentage of the relatively poor were covered by the National Basic Livelihood Security System. She would appreciate an explanation of the reasons why persons classified as poor were not covered by the scheme. In the light of the welcome news of plans to study the revocation of criteria for obligatory support providers, she wondered whether the system could be abolished altogether; perhaps attention could be redirected from the means of the household with the duty to support to the means of the household in need.

69. It was a source of concern that Government policy on the homeless focused on shelter residency rather than on long-term housing solutions. She would like to know whether there were sufficient planning and budget provisions for public rental housing for the homeless. Rising housing costs were also a matter of concern; in 2015, the rent-to-income ratio had risen to a record high. It would be useful to hear whether there were any specific measures to regulate the private housing market and whether rent control legislation was under study.

70. Water pollution was a serious problem, especially since the completion of the Four Major Rivers Restoration project. The increased occurrence of algal blooms had led to potential carcinogens entering the water supply system. She would appreciate an account of long-term measures to restore rivers to cleaner states and ensure safe drinking water.

71. Although approximately 10 per cent of the population lived in absolute poverty, as of 2013 only about 3 per cent of the total population received medical insurance benefits. It would be interesting to learn more about the National Health Insurance Service coverage rate and whether there were plans to extend coverage.

72. According to reports, only some 15 per cent of persons with mental illness received mental health-care services. She wished to know whether there were plans to allocate a greater share of the national health-care budget to mental health care and to devise a more effective national strategy tailored to meet the needs of specific groups, such as young people and the elderly. The Committee would welcome details of the gatekeeper system for suicide prevention and care. With regard to another health-related issue, the Committee would like to know whether the Government had any plans to decriminalize abortion. In the light of reports of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS by medical personnel, the Committee would also appreciate information on measures to ensure that HIV/AIDS

patients received adequate treatment and care. Lastly, she asked whether there were any plans to extend National Health Insurance coverage to include gender reassignment surgery.

73. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that, despite the remarkable progress made in the education sector, the Government still faced significant challenges in terms of the quality of education. Early childcare and education was covered by a dual system, with separate objectives and regulations. As a result, children in the same age group received different educational services, depending on the institution they attended. He wished to know what measures the Government was taking to ensure that all children started their education on equal footing.

74. At the higher levels of education, many students supplemented their studies with extracurricular activities to increase their chances of admission into university. That put poorer students, who could not afford such activities, at a disadvantage. He would appreciate information on policy measures to standardize public education, so that supplementary educational activities were not needed.

75. Gender inequality in education was a matter of concern. He wished to know what steps the Government was taking to ensure inclusive education for all members of society, including children with disabilities.

76. In the light of the growth of minority cultures in the Republic of Korea, he would appreciate statistical information on cultural diversity in the State party. It would be interesting to have an explanation of the low degree of acceptance of multiculturalism in society at large. It would also be helpful to hear about measures taken by the Government to fulfil the recommendations of the United Nations special rapporteur regarding the revision of the school curriculum in order to raise awareness of multiculturalism from an early age.

77. He would welcome details of Government measures to prevent discrimination, which hampered the enjoyment of science-related and cultural rights. He also wished to hear about the policy approach to issues of privacy.

78. Lastly, he understood that the significant role played by private business made it difficult for people to access affordable and reliable social services. In the light of such circumstances, he would appreciate information on measures to facilitate the use of the Internet by disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.